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Avi Brisman and Nigel South, *Monstrous Nature and Representations of Environmental Harm: A Green Cultural Criminological Perspective* (Temple University Press, 2025), 247 pp.

Ascribing to Malthusianism, Thanos, one of the most vindicated if not most beloved antagonists of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), wipes out half of every living being for the greater good. As Avi Brisman and Nigel South argue in a detailed analysis of the MCU, Thanos's philosophy, presented as a quest for resource sustainability, seems to rationalize his genocidal actions for the audiences, leading to his popularity among them. This, in turn, reinforces ecofascist ideas and points to the importance of examining how portrayals of the environment in popular media shape understandings of environmental issues—a concern that lies at the heart of their book: *Monstrous Nature and Representations of Environmental Harms: A Green Cultural Criminological Perspective* (2025).

Crucial to the book's analytical framework is the field of green cultural criminology. While green criminology encompasses a broad spectrum of legal and sociological inquiries into ecological offenses, Brisman and South specifically utilize its "cultural" dimension to examine how media and popular culture serve as primary sites for constructing meanings around environmental crime, harm, and justice. Serving as a conceptual sequel to Brisman and South's previous work, *Green Cultural Criminology: Constructions of Environmental Harm, Consumerism, and Resistance to Ecocide* (2014), this new volume significantly expands their established framework. The authors move beyond approaches that treat environmental narratives primarily as objects of literary or aesthetic analysis, such as the "nature-strikes-back" motif examined in works like Christy Tidwell and Carter Soles' *Fear and Nature: Ecohorror Studies in the Anthropocene* (2021). Such approaches reflect a broader tendency within contemporary ecocritical scholarship, which often emphasizes the blurring of human and non-human boundaries through genres such as ecohorror, body horror, and the gothic. However, less attention has been paid to how these cultural imaginaries actively shape social understandings of environmental harm. Addressing this gap, Brisman and South bridge representation and consequence, examining how such narratives inform public understandings of ecological harm and, crucially, how they may either legitimize or challenge processes of environmental destruction.

The authors substantiate their argument by analyzing a wide range of popular representations and by showcasing how distinct genres and theoretical frameworks—including the gothic, the abject, and the apocalyptic—despite their differing conceptual approaches, all convergently portray nature as a monstrous and threatening force to be feared and forsaken. The authors contend that these portrayals do not exist in a vacuum, neither in their creation nor in their impact. They are rooted in broader historical and cultural contexts, with moments such as the Enlightenment reinforcing the separation of humanity from nature and its construction as the “Other.” Within this logic, nature comes to figure not only as a monstrous or abject force but also as a symbolic stand-in for marginalized groups, producing harmful consequences for both the environment and those cast outside the normative boundaries. In dealing with not only how nature is represented but also why, in what context, and with what impact, the book transcends a simple catalog of representations to become a work of political relevance.

Divided into five main chapters, inclusive of introduction and conclusion, the book examines a series of primary concerns under the umbrella of “Monstrous Nature.” While each chapter addresses a distinct concern, all are interlinked, establishing a basis for the arguments to follow. Chapter Two, “Monstrous Nature and the Roots of Eco-Horror,” examines depictions of monstrous nature by primarily focusing on the notion of eco-horror. Connecting the Gothic tradition of using monsters as symbols for unfamiliar societal anxieties (38), the chapter argues that the portrayal of nature as an enemy, while constantly evolving, serves as a symbolic representation of the era’s anxieties, a notion that resonates throughout the book. Brisman and South synthesize a vast array of existing scholarship to substantiate this argument, grounding their analysis in foundational Gothic texts such as *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Furthermore, to develop a contemporary understanding of eco-horror, they examine cinematic “nature-strikes-back” narratives, focusing in particular on Steven Spielberg’s *Jaws*. By highlighting how the film evoked a disproportionate fear of sharks, the authors demonstrate the tangible impact of media in constructing nature as a site of horror. From a green criminological perspective, this analysis is vital; it illustrates how cultural representations can actively facilitate real-world environmental harm, such as the subsequent decimation of shark populations, by legitimizing the “othering” and destruction of species deemed monstrous.

In Chapter Three, “The Abjection of the Earth,” the authors deepen their inquiry into othering as a major aspect of monstrous nature. By employing Kristevan and Bataille notions of the abject, Brisman and South argue that the powerful degrade the environment only to subsequently reject the resulting “impure” landscapes and the marginalized populations who inhabit them (57). They contend that the Earth is not merely represented as undesirable for some alien “Other,” but is rendered abject by and for humanity itself, reflecting a self-inflicted exclusion from our own vital ecosystems. This framework reveals the different ways individuals, from the disempowered to the powerful, are impacted by and contribute to the

abjection of nature. Through a thorough analysis of Neill Blomkamp's film *Elysium*, the chapter examines the stark division between the privileged elite who abandon the Earth after exploiting its resources and the dispossessed who are left behind to suffer its degraded ruins. The authors effectively bridge this cinematic dystopia with contemporary reality, suggesting that *Elysium's* setting is mirrored in the real-world ambitions of figures such as Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos. Their ventures toward extraterrestrial colonization are framed not merely as scientific progress but as a tangible manifestation of environmental abandonment. This distinction further leads the discussion to how the abjection of the Earth arises from a fear of its retaliation, a fear born from the very act of exploitation and subsequent abandonment once its usefulness has been spent, culminating in an apocalyptic imaginary (71), hence setting the groundwork for the next chapter.

Titled "Apocalyptic Imaginaries," the fourth chapter begins by examining the ubiquity of zombie narratives in popular media. While acknowledging that such figures can be situated within the broader category of eco-horror, Brisman and South identify the zombie as a particularly pervasive narrative that reflects twenty-first-century anxieties surrounding pandemics, xenophobia, and environmental degradation. To ground this theory, the authors analyze specific works such as *The Happening* and *Shaun of the Dead*, arguing that the zombie serves as a stand-in for humanity's "insatiable appetites" and our metaphorical tendency to "eat the world" to sustain ourselves (87). However, the authors emphasize that the zombie does not represent a single "master narrative"; rather, it functions as a collection of narratives that appeal to the diverse fears of a rapidly changing world. Possibly the most experimental section in the book follows in this chapter, as it conceptualizes the progression of apocalyptic media in four subsequent parts: "ecocide," "misericordia," "apocalypse," and "post-apocalypse" (90). The authors utilize large-scale spectacles such as *Deep Impact* and *The Day After Tomorrow* to examine the "ecocide" and "apocalypse" stages, highlighting how mainstream media often prioritizes the thrill of catastrophe over a meaningful engagement with environmental cause and effect, arguing that such depictions romanticize the "survival of the fittest" while overlooking the potential for environmental adaptation and mitigation that could foster a more symbiotic relationship with nature (100). Conversely, they point to the children's book *Just a Dream* by Chris Van Allsburg as a pivotal counter-narrative. By analyzing the protagonist's journey from a polluted, dystopian future to a renewed ethic of environmental stewardship, Brisman and South argue that narratives tracing the full arc of apocalyptic imagination can facilitate more sustainable and reciprocal forms of engagement with nature.

The conclusion, prescriptive in nature, is structured around four key points: the creation of monsters by othering humans and nature; the metaphorical and symbolic value attached to these creations; their material consequences; and the urgent need to challenge and change these harmful representations. Ultimately, the authors conclude by exposing how our cultural and conceptual framings of environmental harms dissuade us from a more ethical engagement with the planet

and one another. While the book's concluding remarks, along with chapter four, offer a valuable prescriptive framework, the work as a whole struggles to provide actionable, concrete solutions. In the context of a project focused on the representation of monstrous nature and its consequences, this limitation is significant, as it reveals a gap between the critical deconstruction of media portrayals and their practical application to real-world environmental stewardship. Moreover, the analysis, while impressively comprehensive and meticulously researched, also raises questions about the book's intended audience. While the theoretical rigor seems tailored for scholars in ecocriticism and green cultural criminology, it is precisely this audience that is likely to already be acutely aware of the harm perpetuated by media representations of nature. Consequently, the book's essential contribution regarding representations of "material consequences and the case for challenging them" (x) may be more appropriate for a wider, less specialized audience. Despite these limitations, *Monstrous Nature and Representations of Environmental Harms: A Green Cultural Criminological Perspective* proves to be an insightful piece of work, efficient in its method and message.